



The Spectacle

From the Office Down the Hall

(Note: this month's article is adapted from a speech I gave to the Arlington Historical Society in May.)

Appropriately enough for July, this month I have a really hot topic to share with you. This story involves hot, sultry moments and things usually better left hidden. By the time we are done, this tale may even raise a few goose bumps. Yes, I want to talk to you about heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems. Wait! This is actually very interesting stuff and I am going to talk about fire too! Did you know that nearly once a minute, somewhere in America, a home catches fire? As it turns out, the United States holds the worst fire record in the entire industrialized world! That means that during the time it takes you to read the *Spectacle*, something like 40 or 50 houses will catch fire across the country. So if you are reading this at work, you may already be thinking: "did I unplug the curling iron before I left home?" Which is perfectly understandable as, personally, I have never trusted *most* of my appliances (especially my VCR.)

Which puts me in pretty good company, because as near as I can tell from reading Nelligan, Robert E. Lee never learned to program a VCR either. But he *did* worry about protecting his family from the "bad airs" that come with summer. Today we call it "code orange" air quality and we're still worried about it—especially the dust and pollution and the humidity. So during the worst months of the year, Mary Lee would sometimes take the kids and head for the mountains to places like Berkeley Springs and White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. Yet even this common sense, easily made decision, had hidden pitfalls: apparently, two of the Lee children caught typhoid while at



Arlington House as seen from the Kennedy gravesite

these places and one of them, Annie, died from it. And, of course, fire was not a stranger to the Lee family either. Rooney Lee lost two houses including his inheritance, The White House Plantation, which was burned by Union troops during the war—one of the few things I *don't* worry too much about these days, but then again, you never know.

So I did a little research. It turns out that you can get a 10% break on your fire insurance if you install a sprinkler system—though unfortunately, when I asked about *my* house, they said dragging a hose with a yard sprinkler through the window doesn't count. This is important because I live in an older house and my circuit box is down right scary. I don't even look up when the lights dim mysteriously. Every time I push down the toaster lever I find myself clenching my teeth—replacing buss fuses gets to be a

chore. In fact, unlike most public buildings which generally lack kitchens, candles and fireplaces, there are any number of ways my house could burn down. My birthday cake alone usually puts the fire department on alert. But I don't have a sprinkler system. It's funny when you think about it—homes burn all the time, but, unlike your house, most businesses have sprinkler systems.

Compare that with an historic home, a public space like, say Arlington House (just as a random example, of course). There is almost no electricity in the house and no furnace (just heat exchangers and blowers in the basement, the boiler is underneath the bathrooms). No one has cooked in it—cicadas or anything else to my knowledge—in over a decade. Mind you, some years ago, we did have curtains catch fire during a candlelight program. So consequently we

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Area Special Events

July 1-4

Anniversary activities at the Gettysburg National Military Park, PA featuring special ranger walks and programs. Free. More info: 717-334-1124, extension 422 or 431 or www.nps.gov/gett.

July 2-4

Reenactment in Gettysburg, PA. This year's "Gettysburg, Crossroads of Destiny" features living history, educational programs, and civilian and military demonstrations throughout the weekend. Battles scheduled for 1 pm Friday, 11 am and 4 pm Saturday, and 11 am and 2 pm Sunday. Much more information, ticket ordering: 717-338-1525 or www.gettysburgreenactment.com.

July 3

Walking tour with living history: Meet spies soldiers, actors and other "citizens" of Washington, DC and decode a spy message during "Courage! The Civil War in Washington" walking tour. Begins 11 am at Cosi Coffee, 10th and E streets NW. Mention you saw it here for ticket discounts. \$12 adult, \$6 under 12 (after discount). 301-588-9255 or mail@historicstrolls.com.

Special program, "Songs and Stories of a Civil War Hospital, Candlelight at Christ Church," at Christ Lutheran Church, 30 Chambersburg St., in Gettysburg, PA. Includes music, history and refreshments. 8 pm. Free. 717-334-5212

Special program, "Antietam Salute to Independence Celebration," at the Antietam National Battlefield, MD. Details: www.nps.gov/anti or 304-535-6298.

July 3-4

Special program, "America's Picnic: Celebrating the Glorious Fourth," includes Civil War living history at the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, WV. Free with admission. www.nps.gov/hafe or 304-535-6298.

Living history encampment and demonstrations by the Miffin Guard at the

Pennsylvania Memorial, Confederates in Pitzer Woods and the US Sharpshooters on Little Round Top in the Gettysburg National Military Park, PA. www.nps.gov/gett or 717-334-1124 extension 422.

July 4

Walking tour, "In the Footsteps of Soldiers," mile hike between Fox's and Turner's Gaps on South Mountain near Boonsboro, MD. Begins 2 pm at Fox's Gap. Free. 301-432-8065.

July 10

Commemoration of the 140th anniversary of Jubal Early's march on Washington at Summit Hall Farm at Bohrer Park in Gaithersburg, MD. Special programs 9:30 am-1:30 pm Free. www.ci.gaithersburg.md.us or 301-258-6350. See also Fort Stevens listing on same day.

Living history, concert and special programs at Fort Stevens in Rock Creek National Park (DC) commemorating the 140th anniversary of the battle. 10 am-4 pm. Free. www.nps.gov/rocr or 202-895-6070.

Special program, "Songs and Stories of a Civil War Hospital, Candlelight at Christ Church," at Christ Lutheran Church, 30 Chambersburg St., in Gettysburg, PA. Includes music, history and refreshments. 8 pm. Free. 717-334-5212.

July 10-11

Living history encampment and demonstrations by Rhode Island artillery at the Pennsylvania Memorial and Virginia troops at Pitzer Woods in the Gettysburg National Military Park, PA. 717-334-1124 extension 422 or www.nps.gov/gett.

Living history and special programs at the Monocacy National Battlefield (near Frederick, MD) commemorating the 140th anniversary of the battle. Free. 301-662-3515 or www.nps.gov/mono.

Living History at Union Mills near Westminster, MD. Federal troops and Confederate prisoners stop at the homestead



for a rest. Civilians, period sutlery, medical display and cavalry demonstrations. Saturday 10 am-5 pm; Sunday 10 am-3 pm. Free. Directions: www.unionmills.org.

Civil War Heritage Weekend at Jackson's Mill in Weston, WV. Encampment and other activities in the historic district noon-7 pm Saturday (battle 4 pm) and Sunday 10 am-3 pm (battle 2 pm). \$5 adults. 800-278-8206.

Living history, anniversary program at Malvern Hill, VA part of the Richmond National Battlefield Park. Infantry and artillery demonstrations. 10 am-5 pm Saturday, 10 am-4 pm Sunday. Free. 804-226-1981 or www.nps.gov/rich.

Living history, encampments and demonstrations recreate the Civil War experience at Sully, the 1794 Fairfax County (VA) homestead of Richard Bland Lee. 10 am-5 pm. Free with admission. Sully is located near Dulles Airport off Route 28 at 3601 Sully Road. 703-437-1794.

Reenactment and Civil War Heritage Weekend at Jackson's Mill, WV the Boyhood Home of Stonewall Jackson, in Weston. 10 am-10 pm Saturday, 10 am-4 pm Sunday. Details: 800-287-8206 or www.jacksonlightburnhomestead.com.

July 11

Guided tour of the site of a Confederate Civil War camp and a freedman's farm on President James Madison's estate, Montpelier, near Orange, VA. Estate was used during the winter of 1863-64 by South Carolina troops. 2 pm. Free with admission (\$11 adults). 540-672-2728 or www.montpelier.org.

Area Special Events (continued)

July 14-19

Bus tour, (DC/WV) "Civil War in West Virginia," a Smithsonian Associates tour of the sites with Ed Bearss. Leaves from Washington DC. Details: 202-786-3276 or www.CivilWarStudies.org.

July 15

Lecture, "The Civil War at Sea," at the USS Constellation in Baltimore's Inner Harbor, MD. 7 pm. \$12 at door, \$10 advance. 410-539-1797 or www.constellation.org.

July 16-18

Reenactment, Smithsburg, MD Heritage Days. living history, military demonstrations, church service, more. Tactical battles 7 pm Friday, 2:30 pm Saturday and 1:30 pm Sunday. Camps open 9 am during weekend. \$5 daily/\$10 for 3-day pass. More info 301-223-6529 or www.hometeamsonline.com/reenactorteam/default.asp?username=smithsburg

July 17

Special program, "Songs and Stories of a Civil War Hospital, Candlelight at Christ

Church," at Christ Lutheran Church, 30 Chambersburg St., in Gettysburg, PA. Includes music, history and refreshments. 8 pm. Free. 717-334-5212

Tour, staff-led walk through Fort Ward in Alexandria, VA. 11 am. Free. 703-838-4848 or www.fortward.org.

Richmond City (VA) Walking Tour presented by a Richmond National Battlefield Park historian. 2 pm. Free. www.nps.gov/rich or 804-226-1981.

Special exhibit, "The 1864 Civil War Battles in Wythe County," in Wytheville (VA) museums. Also special movie showing, tours. More info: www.wytheville.org or 276-223-3315.

Van tour, "First Battle of Manassas," begins at Lee Hall in Newport News, VA at 8 am. \$45. Reservations. 757-888-3371 or www.leehall.org.

July 17-18

Living history encampment at the National Civil War Museum in Harrisburg, PA. 10 am-4 pm Saturday, noon-4 pm Sunday. www.nationalcivilwarmuseum.org or 866-258-4729.

Living history, "Landis Valley: A Civil War Village," at the Landis Valley Museum, 2451 Kissel Hill Road, Lancaster, PA. Period music, displays, military and civilian living history and a visit by Abraham Lincoln. Fee charged. 10 am-5 pm. 717-569-0401 or www.landisvalleymuseum.org.

Living history encampment and demonstrations by North Carolina troops in Pitzer Woods and Virginia Sharpshooters at Spangler Spring in the Gettysburg National Military Park, PA. www.nps.gov/gett or 717-334-1124 extension 422.

July 21-25

Seminar, "The Shenandoah Campaign of 1864," one of the Chambersburg Civil War

Seminars. Includes bus tour. Based in Hagerstown, MD. 717-264-7101 or email chaden@chambersburg.org for details.

July 23-25

"Living Liberty: Bedford (VA) Life in the 1860s," special programs and living history all weekend. Civil War field surgery, period wedding, church services and encampments scheduled. Robert E. Lee and other Civil War figures on hand. Candlelight walking tour. Museum, historic building open houses. Fees for some events. 866-586-2148 or www.centertownbedford.com.

July 24

Beverly Heritage Days includes exhibits relating the Battle of Rich Mountain, WV and house tour. Details: 304-637-RICH or email richmt@richmountain.org.

Special program, "Songs and Stories of a Civil War Hospital, Candlelight at Christ Church," at Christ Lutheran Church, 30 Chambersburg St., in Gettysburg, PA. Includes music, history and refreshments. 8 pm. Free. 717-334-5212.

July 24-25

Living history encampment and demonstrations by the Frederick Ladies Relief Society at the Cyclorama and General Staff at the Pennsylvania Memorial in the Gettysburg National Military Park, PA. www.nps.gov/gett or 717-334-1124 extension 422.

Living history artillery demonstrations at Washington Monument State Park (South Mountain) near Boonsboro, MD. 11 am, 1 and 3 pm Saturday; 11 and 1 pm Sunday. Park fees apply. 301-432-8065.

Living history weekend commemorating the anniversary of the Second Battle of Kernstown, VA. Encampments, demonstrations and march. At the Kernstown battlefield off Route 11 south of Winchester. Free. www.kernstownbattle.org or 540-662-1824.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Arlington House was the home of Robert E. Lee and his family for thirty years and is uniquely associated with the Washington and Custis families. It is now preserved as a memorial to General Lee, who gained the respect of Americans in both the North and the South.

Arlington House
The Robert E. Lee Memorial
c/o George Washington Memorial Parkway
Turkey Run Park
McLean, VA 22101

Phone
703-235-1530

Web Site
<http://www.nps.gov/arho>

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Area Special Events (continued)

Living history, First Battle of Manassas Anniversary activities at the Manassas National Battlefield Park, VA. Special demonstrations and tours. Park fees apply. Click for schedule. Details: 703-361-1339 or www.nps.gov/mana.

July 30-31

Seminar, "McCausland's Raid on Chambersburg," (PA) one of the Chambersburg Civil War Seminars. Based in Chambersburg's Four Points Sheraton. Includes bus tour. 717-264-7101 or email chaden@chambersburg.org for details.

Battle of the Crater anniversary weekend at the Petersburg National Battlefield, VA. Park

rangers and living historians present the story. Free with park admission. www.nps.gov/pete or 804-732-3531.

July 31

Special program, "Songs and Stories of a Civil War Hospital, Candlelight at Christ Church," at Christ Lutheran Church, 30 Chambersburg St., in Gettysburg, PA. Includes music, history and refreshments. 8 pm. Free. 717-334-5212.

July 31-Aug 1

Living history and special programs, "Giving Aid and Comfort: Medical and Relief Work during the Civil War," at the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, WV. Free with

admission. 304-535-6298 or www.nps.gov/hafe.

Living history, "Blue Thunder on the Hill" artillery demonstrations at the National Civil War Museum in Harrisburg, PA. 10 am-4 pm Saturday, noon-4 pm Sunday. 866-258-4729 or www.nationalcivilwarmuseum.org.

Living history encampment and demonstrations by Georgia soldiers at Pitzer Woods and a Virginia unit at Spangler Spring in the Gettysburg National Military Park, PA. 717-334-1124 extension 422 or www.nps.gov/gett

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

Miss Coleman's Chicken Terrapin

In her book, *The Robert E. Lee Family Cooking and Housekeeping Book*, Anne Carter Zimmer explains that the following recipe for Chicken Terrapin was probably an example of culinary evolution. She believes that this recipe originally began using something very different as the main ingredient, once widely available and cheap, and then changed as it became scarce. In this case, Mrs. Zimmer believes this recipe may have started as a recipe for giant sea turtle soup which evolved into creamed chicken as the sea turtles became scarce and chicken more widely available. The name alone provides us with this clue!

Mrs. Zimmer explains that the handwriting of the original recipe included in the Lee Family collection of recipes and the identity of the donor remain mysterious and unidentified.

Cut up a cold chicken (roasted or boiled) into very small pieces, being careful to take off all the skin, put it into a skillet with a wine glass of cream, a good sized piece of butter rolled in flour & season to taste with cayenne pepper, a little Mace & salt. Have ready 3 hard boiled eggs cut into small pieces & a wine glass of wine. When the chicken has come to a good boil, stir them in & in two or three minutes it will be ready to serve.

3 T. butter at room temperature
2 T. flour
2 c. chicken (or turkey), cooked, skinned, boned and cut in small pieces
½ c. or more whipping cream
¼ t. mace
1/8 – ¼ t. red pepper
Salt to taste
3 hard-boiled eggs
¼ c. sherry or Madeira*

Bring eggs to a boil in cold water, simmer 12 minutes. Shell them under cold running water and chop into small pieces. *Do not refrigerate.*** Cream together butter and flour. Heat and stir in cream, seasoning, and chicken. Before serving the sauce, stir in wine, then chopped eggs. Heat briefly, stirring carefully so as not to break up eggs.

* Mrs. Zimmer says this recipe *demands* the flavor of this type of wine; don't use white wine.

** If the eggs are overcooked or refrigerated, they will become tough according to Mrs. Zimmer. She suggests serving this with waffles.

Significant Historic Events in July

Mid- July, 1837

Lt. Lee traveled to St. Louis to supervise the clearing of the Mississippi harbor there. His traveling companion and subordinate on the project was Second Lieutenant Montgomery C. Meigs, a recent West Point graduate. On the way, Lee stopped in Baltimore to see the Washington war tents and other Arlington relics at the museum to which Mr. Custis had loaned them.

July 1-3, 1863

(Battle of Gettysburg)

On July 1, victory went to the confederates, who held the town when Lee arrived. Despite Lee's wish, Cemetery Hill was not attacked and opportunity was lost.

On July 2, Lee ordered Longstreet's corps to attack the United States Army's left, but Longstreet opposed the plan, and there were delays. Confederate attacks were not properly coordinated, and United States troops held Little Round Top. Yet at the end of the day neither army had made any appreciable gain.

On July 3, Lee attempted a massive attack on Meade's center, the infamous Pickett's Charge. The assault was a disastrous failure. As the Confederates retreated, Lee could say only, "All this has been my fault." Nearly one third of the Confederates' 65,000 man invasion force were casualties at the end of the battle, including 2592 killed.

July 2, 1899

Brigadier General Horatio Gouveneur Wright, former Chief of Army Engineers, died. He was buried on the lawn in front of Arlington House. Although Wright (b. March 6, 1820) participated in several engagements during the Civil War, notably the defense of Washington during the attack by Jubal Early's forces in July 1864, he is perhaps best known for completing the Washington Monument in 1884.

July 4, 1825

George Washington Parke Custis inaugurated a tradition of Forth of July

celebrations at Arlington Spring. A large number of guests were invited to take dinner at a long table in the shade of the Washington war tents. Custis would usually speak on some aspect of the struggle for freedom around the world. In 1825, Custis spoke about Lafayette, who was continuing his tour of the nation after having visited Arlington the previous January. He praised Simon Bolivar, the liberator of South America. But most of his speech concerned the independence for Ireland of which he was a consistent proponent.

July 7, 1804

George Washington Parke Custis, 23, and Mary Lee "Molly" Fitzhugh, 16, were married in the Fitzhugh town house on Oronoco Street, Alexandria. The Saturday evening ceremony was performed by the Rev. Mr. Davis, who had officiated at the wedding of Nelly and Lawrence Lewis five years before and who had comforted Martha Washington as she lay dying.

July 10, 1829

Ann Hill Carter Lee, mother of Robert E. Lee, died at Ravensworth. Her son had nursed her in the last illness and was at her side when she died. He then cared for Nat, an elderly house slave left by his mother to Lee's sister Mildred.

July 12, 1835

Mary Lee Custis, second child and first daughter of Robert and Mary Lee was born at Arlington. Mrs. Lee developed a serious pelvic infection and was confined to bed for almost four months.

July 15, 1852

Eleanor 'Nellie' Custis Lewis (1779-1852), sister of George Washington Parke Custis, died at Audley, the home of her daughter. She was 74 years old. George Washington Parke Custis thus became the last surviving child of John Parke Custis and one of the last members of the Mount Vernon household. Since Robert E. Lee was at home, he probably attended the funeral service with his family at Mount Vernon.

July 17, 1853

Robert E. Lee and his daughters Mary and Annie, kneeling together at the altar rail, were confirmed at Christ Church [Episcopal] by Bishop John Johns. Lee had a religious upbringing, but he had not joined the church. Though there "is nothing to indicate any spiritual upheaval" in Lee's life, it is probable that the Mexican War and the recent death of Mrs. Custis "bought the great questions of faith closer to him." Lee was 46 years old, Mary eighteen and Annie fourteen.

July 21, 1861

(First Battle of Manassas: Bull Run)

The first major battle of the Civil War was a Confederate victory. United States forces under Gen. Irvin McDowell—who had made his headquarters at Arlington—were routed and fled back to Washington and their encampments on the Arlington Estate. Lee, who was serving as military advisor to President Davis, remained in Richmond at Davis' command. But a fourth of the victorious army had been raised and put in the field at Lee's direction, and he had a large hand in fashioning the strategy that made victory possible.

July 24, 1838

George Washington Parke Custis gave an oration at the commencement of Georgetown College in Washington. Custis, a vigorous supporter of religious freedom, was an honored friend of the Jesuits who administered Georgetown College.

July 28, 1812

While defending a friend and freedom of the press, Henry Lee, father of Robert E. Lee, was set upon by a Baltimore mob and so severely injured that he was "weak", crippled, and disfigured, doomed to invalidism for the remaining six years of his life.

From the Office Down the Hall (continued)

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don't do real candlelight anymore. With all that said, I still sit bolt upright every time the phone rings at 3 a.m. But Arlington House really isn't likely to burn down. None-the-less, we have begun the somewhat controversial process of installing some kind of fire suppression sprinkler system.

So if the House is so unlikely to burn, why are we spending a lot of time and money putting in a sprinkler system, especially since this kind of thing absolutely cannot be done without damaging at least some original fabric in the house? And I haven't even started on issues surrounding air conditioning yet. The House has survived 200 years without these things, why do we need them now?

Let me ask this question in a different way: which is more important to you, your lungs or your kidneys? What kind of question is that to ask? No one should ever have to make a decision like that. Perhaps a better question might be: which is more important, your heart or your mind?

Because in many ways this characterizes this very difficult and serious issue we are now struggling with. We are looking at saving Arlington House from destruction and so must ask: which is more important, *the House*, the room where Robert E. Lee paced the floor for hours struggling with a personal decision that effected the course of the Nation, or *the museum collection*, the chair where he may have sat to pen his resignation? Which is the greater treasure, the family Bible Lee almost certainly consulted in his struggle to decide? Or the Family Parlor where the Bible probably sat for much of the time the Lees lived at Arlington and where you can see it now?

Again, how can we ask a question like this? They are both so important and so intertwined. What if Arlington House burned and the next time you looked up from the Lincoln Circle, there was nothing on the hill but grass and gravesites? Would we still be able to bridge the gap of years and connect with the great moment in America's

history that took place in the House? Alternately, what if the chair and Bible and all the rest of the collection were removed to a museum where they could be kept sealed in carefully controlled climate conditions? They would be better protected there—no doubt—but would Arlington lose some of its immediacy and life? Would the ghost of Lee's decision depart?

That is what we are really talking about when we discuss the "HVAC", the heating, ventilation, fire suppression and air conditioning at Arlington House. It is not a question of BTUs and ducts; we are weighing kidneys and lungs; we are pitting the heart against the mind. You cannot live without either of these and all of us would lose something just as irreplaceable if some terrible thing happened to either the House or the collection. But I tell you it is *already* happening. Fire scares us because it is so sudden and so catastrophic, but the slings and arrows of Virginia's wildly swinging seasons are destroying the House and the objects within just as surely, even if much more slowly.

I spoke to Jim Reese, the director of Mount Vernon, about this. He said there was a huge furor over their decision a few years ago to install HVAC and fire suppression. This was due in large part because there is absolutely no way to install these systems without damaging or destroying some historic fabric of the house. You have to be able to get the ducts and pipes from basements to attics, and this means punching through walls and closets. Mt. Vernon, some argued, was too important, too irreplaceable to allow any damage to come to it. Look what happened at Maggie Walker National Historic Site in Richmond; it has become the poster child of what not to do with fire suppression. Big, shiny pipes now emerge from awkward places and all but destroy the "grandma" ambiance of the house. Apparently the company that did the installation is embarrassed and has pledged to re-engineer the system and "fix" it. But even if you plaster over it, damage was done—and more damage will be done in the repair. Is Arlington House

any less valuable than these other historic homes so that we don't worry about damaging it?

Over the last couple of years the windows were removed from much of Arlington House and taken to a preservation shop. They were striped of decades of paint. Then they received "Dutch repairs", which means cutting out broken or rotten places and fitting new pieces of wood. Beneath all that paint, many of the sashes and mullions and muttoms were in surprisingly good condition. But also hidden under layers of brown and tan and other strange hues were a surprising array of *older* Dutch repairs made the last time this was done. Some of the glass panes were original, but most have been broken and replaced over the years. Similarly, with the possible exception of some of the bedrooms, none of the Arlington House floor is original. Plaster has been replaced on ceilings and modern bricks line sections of the foundation. Little by little, Arlington House is being replaced. It is becoming one big Dutch repair. Someday, simply through preservation efforts, there may be very little historic fabric left in a very old house.

So I have come to the conclusion that preserving the museum collection is more important than preserving the House. It is more important to me that the chair arms that may have felt Lee's sweat as he struggled with his resignation remain protected and untouched than it is to try to maintain some false hope of keeping every piece of wood, glass, plaster and mortar of the House *itself* unchanged. *But only if the collection actually remains in the House.* Therefore we need a fire suppression system to keep catastrophe at bay *and* we need a climate management system to keep the chairs from alternately swelling and shrinking until they come unglued—even if installing these systems promises to damage some historic fabric in the House. This may be a form of "tough love", but it is the only way to ensure the continued safety of the House and its precious belongings.

Yet like a summer trip to the mountains, even

From the Office Down the Hall (continued)

with this big decision made, there are still things to worry me at 3 a.m. Should we put in a “mist” system for fire suppression that uses a tiny amount of water that only fogs the air in a fine spray? Or a standard, low-pressure sprinkler system that perches overhead full of water like some kind of brooding storm? What about the horror stories of system failures and floods? Mist systems significantly reduce the danger of accidental flooding, but they require much larger, much more intrusive, high-pressure pipes and significant, high-maintenance support equipment. Dry-pipe sprinkler systems also reduce the danger of flooding, but they require drainable pipes that run at ugly diagonals across walls and compressors to keep air pumped into the pipes. And how do we ensure that the climate management system doesn’t cool the air so much that it pushes the dew point deep into the masonry walls where moisture can rot the house unseen? How do we reach a balance between the temperature, the humidity, the needs of the collection and the comfort of the staff and visitors—all of which are different? Suddenly, these questions of hearts and minds are no longer academic; these are management issues that we have to solve.

Last month you may have seen new faces and heard strange jargon at Arlington House as a

team of experts enjoined these questions in value analysis workshops in the conference room. This turned out to be a tough discussion that is not over yet. But already I can tell you that we have thrown out any plans that include “air conditioning” Arlington House. In fact, the pursuit of temperature control has turned out to be a red herring. *Humidity* is the monster that must be tamed. And to that end, *ventilation* is the key (versus our current ventilation scheme: box fans and open windows). So instead of an HVAC system that fills the house with a modern chill and sends moisture into the walls, we will have a “climate management system” that moves lightly conditioned air throughout the House to stave off humidity swings. The House will still feel warm in the summer and cool in the winter, just as it did in 1861, but the worst of the weather spikes will be blunted and both the House and the collections will benefit. Over the next few months, you may continue to see conservators, cultural landscape experts, architects, archeologists and engineers speaking the curious language of forced air and landscape. I encourage you to ask questions and join in the dialogue because there is a careful balance here that can only be reached with the help of all of us who care so much about the place and story that is Arlington House. But despite the

difficulties of the work ahead, our regional curator seems to have summed it up pretty well when she said, “I would rather have a wet collection than a burned one.”

Yet the details of ducts and fans may be in our way. If we get bogged down discussing the web of capillaries that line our kidneys and filter impurities from blood; if we carry on about how CO-2 is exchanged with oxygen in tiny sacks in our lungs, I fear we will lose sight of the vital organs themselves we need to sustain us. The important thing here is that all these things must be protected together. You can’t ask which is more important; they are *all* important: your mind *and* your heart, the House *and* the collection. Like Rooney Lee, Arlington House is now part of all of our collective inheritance. We may sacrifice some small parts of historic fabric in the process, but short of General McClellan’s troops showing up for a tour with torches in hand, I think we will find the right balance to protect the house *and* the collection for a long, long time.

Kendell Thompson
Site Manager
Arlington House
The Robert E. Lee Memorial



AN IMPORTANT REMINDER

Please contact Delphine Gross no later than the 20th of each month with availability dates and times to be posted the following month (Please call by July 20th with August information). Even if you are a regularly scheduled VIP please contact Delphine to confirm your availability. Again, the contact number is (703) 235-1530 ext. 227. Please leave the dates and times you are available on the voice mail. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Arlington House
The Robert E. Lee Memorial
c/o George Washington Memorial Parkway
Turkey Run Park
McLean, VA 22101

<<Name>>
<<Address>>
<<CityStateZip>>

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™

The Spectacle is a monthly newsletter for the volunteers of Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial.

Editor

Dorothy Carns

Newsletter layout

Keith Drews

Supervisory Park Ranger

Frank Cucurullo

Contributors

Kendell Thompson

Delphine Gross

NPS Photographers

Keith Drews

Comments? Write to:

Kendell Thompson, Site Manager
Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial
c/o George Washington Memorial Parkway
Turkey Run Park
McLean, VA 22101

Volunteers Needed

The roster of active volunteers is in dire need of additional names! If you know anyone interested in joining our ranks please refer them to Delphine Gross, Volunteer Coordinator (703) 235-1530 ext 227.

